

Implications of Major Program Changes on Accreditation Processes

February 2013

Introduction

This agenda item begins the discussion of whether the Commission's accreditation system needs to be revised in some manner to require institutions to report major changes to the approved program in a manner other than is currently required.

Staff Recommendation

This is an information item.

Background

Important to the goal of ongoing program improvement in accreditation is a recognition that all programs are ever changing to continue to better meet the needs of their candidates and the communities they serve. The Commission's current accreditation system not only acknowledges program improvement based upon evidence about the effectiveness of a program, but encourages a continual process of change and improvement. At the same time, this viewpoint presents some challenges for the accreditation system. Currently, the Commission has several opportunities for institutions and programs to provide information about changes they have made to the approved programs. First, the biennial report format contains a section that asks institutions to report changes that have been instituted since the last accreditation activity. Institutions report changes such as changes to coursework, fieldwork, course sequence and other such changes. In addition, program assessment documents are updated prior to submission in the 4th year of the site visit. If changes are made by institutions and programs between the submission of program assessment documents and the site visit, institutions are asked to provide the site visit team with an addendum that outlines the changes so that the site visit team understands recent changes and can determine whether these changes still meet the required standards.

Generally then, changes made over the course of normal operations of a program are recorded and incorporated into the routine accreditation activities. The question has been raised as to whether a different process should be implemented for some types of changes that could indicate a significant change to the approved program. A recent example is that an institution changed the teaching performance assessment. Notification was provided prior to this change in the form of a letter and a notation was made in the institution's file. However, no additional standards revisions were required. Another recent example is that of an induction program that was part of a larger consortium that has since decided to serve only its own district. Both of these examples might suggest that significant changes have been made to the manner in which the program operates from that contained in the document that was approved by the Commission. It can be argued that the program that is operating after the changes have been implemented is not the same program that was approved.

On the other hand, the Commission is not staffed to monitor every type of change made by approved programs. Having institutions rewrite to the standards for all types, even most types, of changes is not feasible from the perspective of both the institution and the Commission.

That said, the Commission staff would like to discuss this challenge with the COA to determine if there are ways that the current accreditation system should be revised to ensure that a program that has undergone significant changes is still in alignment with Commission standards.

Some examples of significant changes could include:

- Eliminating or changing coursework
- Changing delivery model from face to face to online or hybrid model
- Changing TPA model
- Changing the number of units required of the program or for a course
- Changing how supervision is organized
- Changing key partners or service area

Some questions the COA should discuss are:

- Is the current notification requirement of changes to a program or an institution sufficient?
- What kinds of changes would be considered “major” changes?
- Are there some changes that should be designated as “major changes” that would require not only notification to the Commission, but approval?
- Are there some major changes that would require a rewriting of the standards?

Next Steps

Based on the discussion at the COA meeting, the Commission will either modify existing practice or bring another agenda item on this topic to the COA at its next meeting.